

FROM: The Office
January 1966

SPACE IS PROBLEM FOR RECORDS MANAGERS

EDWARD J. WENCEK

Vice President, Assn. of Records Executives & Administrators.
Records Administrator,
American Electric Power Service Corp., New York.

The last words in American Management Assn. Bulletin No. 56 (Paperwork Management in Transition: The Impact of Automatic Data Processing) state: "Records managers today are trying to control the results of two trends which reinforce each other in creating formidable paperwork problems: (1) a growing centralization---particularly in government but also in business itself---that has brought with it requirements for more and more records; (2) the sometimes frightening power of computers to deliver an avalanche of printed information at the push of a button."

A science fiction story ("Ms Fnd in a Lbry" by Hal Draper) gives some warning as to what the records or information manager may someday face. So much information will be generated that it will be stored in a building 25 miles square and two miles high under the ocean. To save space and reading time, words will be reduced to consonants as in Speedwriting. The computerized index to this huge file will itself need and index. Eventually dependent indexes will grow until education in their use becomes a specialized field and the best educated know only how to look for information and no one ever seems to find it, so hardly anyone knows anything. The records volume, despite miniaturization, eventually displaces the ocean water which begins to flood the land. Then, one day someone, somewhere feeds a computer a wrong index and the world stops.

Computers print out information faster than anyone can read or absorb it. A person requesting print-out data tends to hold onto it, assuming that if he needs it again it will be more accessible in a file than in the computer. We should be aware of the radical technological advances coming in the future, but for today . . . paper is being made, copiers are selling well, typewriters are still being mass produced, ballpens are everywhere.

In our everyday work, requests are made for written forms of communication. Decisions are made and recorded on paper. The immediate problem is storage space. Retention schedules have helped but the volume increases each year. Shorter retention periods are not always feasible.

Our total dependency on the box-on-shelf concept will have to be altered. Microfilm is an answer and advances from 35 mm down to microdots is commendable. In some instances, it is economically difficult to use microfilm especially for short-term records. There is also the problem of indexing, of working with incomplete files, and interfiles. Hard copies are not easily

or cheaply obtained. But right now, microfilm is our best means of records compression.

A recent and promising miniaturization concept is video tape. Still in its infancy for this purpose and very expensive, it is worthy of consideration. On tape you can interfile, erase and key records for random filing and recall.

Records managers and all businessmen have the same problems today that they had yesterday. Tomorrow's immediate problems are not the computer itself but what it does. It prints---fast! Your worth will be proved by your ability to store information in a given space and get it on demand. As long as man bases his decisions on what he has seen, heard and/or read, the hard copy or print-out has to be kept readily available either in its original form or in some form of miniaturization.